

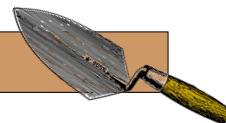


Appleby Archaeology Newsletter



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Group News

I hope you've enjoyed this summer as much as I have. Remarkably, almost all of Apparch's outings so far have been blessed with excellent weather and we were pleased to note their popularity with members. The Hartlepool trip is still to come of course (20th Sept) and that's one I've been really looking forward to.

In October we start our Autumn lecture series when Erik Matthews will be bringing us up to date with progress at Hornby Hall. Several of our members have been working at the site and have been dropping heavy hints that Erik has quite a lot to tell us. Details of this talk and the rest of the Autumn lecture series can be found on the back page.

I hope you're remembering that our lecture evenings will be taking place in Centre 67 and not the Market Hall from now on, so please don't turn up in Boroughgate out of habit and wonder where we are! If you do, we're just 200 yards away behind the Tufton Arms. The Centre, which is a former chapel, is adjacent to the Broad Close car park in Chapel Street. Parking is free after 6pm, so this should prove very convenient if you come by car. I hope that the map below will make things clear.



Looking forward to seeing you in our new venue.

With best wishes, Martin Joyce



An Evening Walk to the Prehistoric Monuments on Askham Fell

About twenty Appleby Archaeology Group members, plus a couple of spouses, enjoyed a summer's evening walk on Moor Divock, Askham Fell in the company of Martin Railton. We were there to look at the prehistoric monuments, to learn about how the sites related to each other and to consider how they fitted into the wider landscape.



Martin Railton introduces Apparch members to some of the prehistoric remains on Askham Moor

Moor Divock is very rich in archaeological monuments dating to the Bronze Age and a short walk from the vehicles brought us to the first site – the Kopstone. This stone is a little over 1.5 metres high and is now solitary but is thought to be the last remaining stone of a former circle. Martin explained how the Kopstone is visible from many directions – could it have been a “waymarker” in antiquity?

Close by are other monuments: some that appear to be the remains of further stone circles, several cairns, vestigial stone avenues, and a group of boulders that has been described as a possible “cromlech”. From this point the mid-summer solstice sun can be seen to set upon the distinctive saddle of Blencathra.

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Martin led the group to view the remains of several burial cairns – the most interesting being on a slightly elevated site and still retaining the remains of a cist at its centre.

When first discovered, the cist was found to contain several bones from an adult. There was much discussion about the small size of the cist and several suggestions as to how a body may have been positioned in the space – nobody actually volunteered to lie down in the cist to test our theories but Harry Hawkins was eventually persuaded to stand in it and give an indication of scale!



Harry in a hole

Our final stop, with Martin explaining about the archaeological landscape en route, was the largest of the Moor Divock circles. The Cockpit, as it is known, has a diameter of 25 metres. None of the stones is taller than about a metre and many are fallen but it's still an impressive circle. There are the possible remains of a burial cairn on its eastern side. The centre of the circle is the viewing point from which Great Mell Fell aligns with Blencathra.

Martin was warmly thanked by all of us for leading an informative and interesting walk – our evening drew to a close just as the midges were beginning to bite!

Carol Dougherty

A Guided Tour of Shap Abbey and its environs

On a sunny Sunday afternoon in June 10 members of the Group met for a picnic and a gentle stroll round the picturesque ruins of Shap Abbey whilst Harry Hawkins generously shared his far reaching research into the Abbey and its history.

Shap is not an area renowned for either sunshine or tranquil views, but on that afternoon it was easy to see why a steady stream of visitors could be observed driving cautiously down the steep farm track and then wandering through the grounds of the Premonstratensian abbey which nestles peacefully beside the upper reaches of the river Lowther.

Taking their inspiration from the Cistercians, the austere Premonstratensians favoured remote locations. Shap was founded in 1199 after the canons received a land grant from the local landowner Thomas Gospatric. It was one of the last great abbeys to be built in England.

For almost four and a half centuries the canons of Shap Abbey led a peaceful existence, expanding their holdings through land grants and by enclosing and improving the surrounding moorland. With our experienced and knowledgeable guide we were able to detect traces of medieval field systems and boundaries in the landscape. In its heyday the Abbey must have been an impressive and welcome sight to travellers.



The Abbey as it may have appeared in the 1530s shortly before its suppression (photo by Liam Wales, courtesy English Heritage)

Today little remains apart from the ruins of the 15th century tower which was built in the time of Abbot Richard Redman. It was during his leadership that the Abbey was extended and the great west tower, whose remains

still dominate the site, was built. Abbot Redman, the son of a local landowner, rose to be head of the Premonstratensians in England and was successively appointed Bishop of St. Asaph, Exeter and Ely. He was one of the most important churchmen of his time and served under 5 medieval kings.



The remains of the Great Tower at Shap Abbey - picture courtesy of John Armagh at Wikimedia Commons

Shap was one of the last great Abbeys to be dissolved by Henry's commissioners, lasting until 1540 when the Abbey was dismantled and the Abbot accepted a pension of £40 a year; a considerable sum in Tudor England.

Some of its later history is just as fascinating. The nearby farmhouse is almost certainly built mainly from abbey stones. Many of the carved pieces were taken by the then Earl of Lowther to make one of his famous gardens at Lowther Castle in advance of a visit from Kaiser Wilhelm II. They were subsequently removed by English Heritage and are now "in storage".

Many visitors to Shap concentrate on its famous prehistoric remains, but the later history is just as fascinating. When you go, look out for the small carved circles where the canons used to stand during services or try to spot plundered abbey stones in the dry stones walls of the surrounding fields.

Our thanks must go to Harry Hawkins for revealing the fascinating facts behind our local landscapes.

Heather Edwards

Editor's note - there's a really good account of the abbey on the English Heritage website at :

www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/shap-abbey/history-and-research/

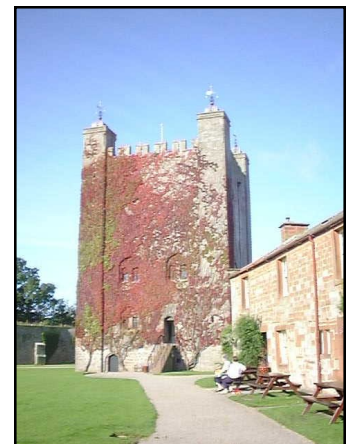
Appleby Archaeology Visit to Appleby Castle

I didn't take any notes during our evening excursion last month, so if it's facts and figures you want I'm afraid you'll have to look them up on Wikipedia. But I enjoyed our tour of Appleby Castle enormously and if you weren't there I hope that this account of my impressions may encourage you to pay a visit too.

It had been ages since I had last been round the castle. I seem to remember that last time I was there it had been a wildlife park. And of course it has been closed to the public for many years, reopening only last September when it again became possible to arrange a guided tour. So you may imagine that when we assembled at the top of Boroughgate I was looking forward very much to seeing what had been going on.

It was a damp, atmospheric evening but there was a good crowd of us and I'm sure I counted 16 heads at one point. We were welcomed warmly by our guide but, as we walked up the drive into the Bailey, it became clear that things had changed, - and not generally for the better. The chief memory from my previous visit was of the startling perfection of the free-standing Norman Keep (Caesar's Tower) at the western end of the Bailey. This now lay hidden behind a sullen wall of scaffolding. Orange barrier tape ensured we didn't get too close. The structure had become unsafe and, on all sides, buildings lay derelict and seemingly abandoned. Clearly a lot needed doing.

But our excellent guide ensured I saw the site in a fresh light. Last time I was here I was a tourist looking for a cup of tea and a day out. Now I was more interested in history and architecture.



Caesar's Tower : courtesy of Carl Bendelow : Wikimedia Commons

For a start I now realised that the site was altogether bigger than I remembered. The enormous ditches that surrounded the bailey and the sheer drop down to the river on the east seemed previously to have escaped my attention completely. Likewise I had completely forgotten about the medieval Round Tower and the substantial range of sixteenth century buildings – the Mansion House – at the eastern end of the Bailey.



Apparch members inspect the Mansion House

We couldn't visit Caesar's Tower but there was plenty besides to entertain and inform. Starting with a tour of the walls and stopping only to admire the soaring walls of the Round Tower and the startling drop to the river below the portcullis entrance to the east we re-entered the Bailey via a back door and gathered in the "banqueting hall" on the ground floor of the Mansion house. This building houses many relics of Lady Anne Clifford who made the castle her home during the mid-17th century.

The breathless tour that now ensued was pure Hogwarts and would surely have left even Harry Potter looking pale-faced and boggle-eyed. From the banqueting hall we worked our way upwards through the Great hall, stuffed with suits of armour, terrifying portraits and much fearsome weaponry, emerging eventually in bedrooms bedecked with ancient tapestries and groaning with monstrous oaken four-poster beds. Tales of ghosts and Ouija boards there were a-plenty. And now we entered the Round Tower. Primed with direful warnings of narrow, dark passages and steep steps we first ascended to the roof and then reversed our route and inspected the dungeons which lurked below. These were thoroughly nasty, featuring all of the previously cited hazards with the addition of spiders, walls that wept with mildew and floors that ran with water. There were even skeletons. Finally we popped out into a bizarre corridor lined with mirrors on one side and a range of mysterious doors on the other. What lay behind? We never found out. One was just relieved to find that one was suddenly (and magically?) back in the banqueting hall and still in possession of a full set of working limbs - plus a keen desire for a strong drink.

Yes, it had been another excellent Apparch outing. Our thanks go to the Castle management for their warm welcome and we wish them the best of luck in their efforts to restore the Castle.

Martin Joyce

Autumn Events and Lectures

Bus Trip to Hartlepool

Saturday 20th Sept

Organiser : Richard Stevens. See website for details

Elite living in the Provinces - further excavations at Hornby Castle

Tuesday 14th Oct

Speaker : Erik Matthews

An outline of the most recent findings of the on-going research at the "Pleasaunce" associated with the castle and speculation of their implications for the lifestyle of the Late Medieval aristocracy.

The Crosby Garrett Helmet.

Tuesday 11th Nov

Speakers : Chris Healey and Trish Shaw

Post-find archaeological investigations of the landscape surrounding the find-site and a discussion of how and why the helmet might have been buried at Crosby Garrett.

The archaeology of Ports and the Coast

Tuesday 9th Dec

Speaker : Richard Newman

All lectures will take place at 7.30pm in Centre 67 in Chapel Street

